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Letter dated 26 January 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you the information regarding freedom of religion and belief in the Republic of Uzbekistan (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 67.

(*Signed*) Alisher **Vohidov**
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Annex to the letter dated 26 January 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Freedom of religion and belief in the Republic of Uzbekistan

Currently, 2,222 religious organizations and 16 denominations are active in Uzbekistan. Among the organizations, 2,042 (92 per cent) are Muslim, as 88 per cent of the country's population consider themselves to be followers of Islam.

In addition, Uzbekistan has 164 Christian organizations, eight Jewish communities, six Baha'i communities, one Hare Krishna society and one Buddhist temple.

While there were only 84 mosques in Uzbekistan in 1990, by 1 January 2007, there were 2,029. As at 1 January 2006, 2,016 mosques had been registered, which means that 13 additional mosques have been registered over the past year.

In accordance with the standards of international human rights covenants and agreements concerning freedom of conscience, the legislation of Uzbekistan takes into consideration the basic provisions and requirements of these international instruments and establishes principles and procedures for the implementation of the constitutionally protected freedom of religion and belief.

The Constitution of Uzbekistan guarantees freedom of conscience, the right to establish and join religious organizations, equality before the law and non-interference of the State in the activities of religious organizations.

The Constitution prohibits the establishment of religious associations which foment religious strife and the establishment of religious political parties.

In accordance with the Uzbek Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Act, freedom of conscience is a constitutionally guaranteed right of citizens to profess any religion or none.

Uzbekistan is a secular State, and the Government of Uzbekistan places no restrictions on religious organizations as to their size or places where they may operate.

Freedom to profess a religion or other convictions is subject only to those restrictions that are necessary for the protection of national security and public order or the life, health, morals, rights and freedoms of other citizens.

Foreign nationals and stateless persons enjoy the same right to freedom of conscience and freedom of belief as Uzbek citizens and are liable under the law for breaches of legislation on freedom of conscience and religious organizations.

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the imposition of religious views by force is not allowed. The Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Act affirms that the State shall maintain peace and harmony among religious faiths. Activities aimed at converting the adherents of one faith to another

(proselytism) and any other missionary activity are prohibited. Persons found guilty of violating this rule are punishable under the law.

Uzbek citizens are equal before the law, regardless of their religious views. Reference to a citizen's religious views in official documents is prohibited. Any restriction of rights or the establishment of direct or indirect privileges on the basis of religious views, the incitement of strife or hatred, contempt for the feelings of citizens with regard to their religious or atheistic convictions and the desecration of venerated religious and ceremonial sites are punishable by law.

Freedom of belief for Uzbek citizens, as provided for under the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, is realized by extending the same rights and responsibilities to all of the country's religious organizations.

Under the Uzbek Education Act of 29 August 1997, one of the basic principles of State education policy is the secular nature of the education system.

The State education system in the Republic of Uzbekistan is kept separate from religion, and the inclusion of religious subjects in its curricula is not permitted. Every citizen has the right to a secular education, regardless of his or her religious views.

The central governing bodies of religious organizations have the right to establish religious schools to train clergy and the necessary religious personnel.

The Tashkent Islamic University, the Islamic Institute, 10 madrasas, one Orthodox Christian seminary and one Protestant seminary are currently operating in Uzbekistan. In the 2006/07 school year, 124 students are studying at the Tashkent Islamic Institute, 900 at the 10 madrasas, 49 at the Orthodox seminary and 33 at the Protestant seminary.

Under the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Act, the central governing bodies of religious organizations are entitled to produce, export, import and distribute religious objects, religious literature and other religious material under the procedure established by law.

If the religious literature was published abroad, it may be shipped and sold after the content of each publication has been reviewed in accordance with the procedure established by national legislation.

In the years following independence, the Koran, Hadith selections from the al-Bukhari collection, the Bible, 16 books of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament, a history of the apostles and other religious literature were translated into Uzbek for the first time.

In late 2004 the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, in conjunction with the Uzbek Society for the Blind, published the Holy Koran in Braille. Uzbekistan became the third State in the world to carry out such a noble deed. There are some 24,000 blind persons currently living in Uzbekistan. Specialized boarding schools and public libraries and all persons so desiring will be provided with copies of the Koran in Braille.

A Council on Faith Matters has been established under the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Cabinet of Ministers to promote interaction among religious organizations, to assist them in carrying out their activities and to develop joint measures to strengthen interfaith and inter-ethnic peace and harmony. Its

membership consists of the leaders of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent and Central Asian diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Union of Evangelical Baptist Christian Churches, the Full Gospel Christian Church Centre, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Jewish religious community of Tashkent.

The religious organizations of Uzbekistan freely celebrate all religious holidays. Thus, with every year, more and more Muslims celebrate Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, Christians Easter and Christmas, and Jews Passover, Purim and Hanukkah.

By presidential decrees, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha have been declared holidays.

Every year, believers make pilgrimages to holy sites with the extensive support of the Government: Muslims go to Saudi Arabia, Christians to the Russian Federation, Greece and Israel, and Jews to Israel. During the past 15 years, more than 50,000 Uzbek citizens have completed the hajj to Saudi Arabia and pilgrimages to the holy sites of their religions in Israel and the Russian Federation.